



**From mountain to sea**

# UNIVERSAL NURTURE

Guidance for schools on  
Developing a whole school approach

**November 2021**



## Contents

Case for Universal Nurture .....	2
What is Nurture? .....	2
Adopting a whole school approach .....	3
Nurture Principles.....	4
(1) Learning is understood developmentally .....	4
(2) The school and classroom offer a safe base .....	4
(3) Nurture is important for the development of wellbeing.....	5
(4) Language is a vital means of communication .....	5
(5) All behaviour is communication .....	6
(6) Transitions are significant in the lives of children.....	6
School environment.....	6
A nurturing classroom .....	7
Primary classroom .....	7
Secondary classroom .....	7
Nurture Nooks/Spaces .....	7
Transitions.....	9
Keeping pupils in mind.....	9
Ideas for resources.....	9
Visual tools.....	10
How to develop a universal approach to Nurture .....	10
Further information/resources .....	11
References.....	12
Appendices .....	14
Appendix 1: Whole School Readiness Checklist.....	14

## Case for Universal Nurture

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC, 2014) places children and young people's wellbeing at the center of all assessment, planning and intervention. It recognises the part that the wider environment plays in supporting the development of children and young people and places a responsibility on all adults to ensure the wellbeing needs of all children are met (ASPEP, 2019).

The National Improvement Framework, sets out clear priorities to deliver excellence and equity, including: closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people and improving children and young people's health and wellbeing. There is clear evidence of a significant gap in attainment between children and young people from the wealthiest and the poorest households (Sosu & Ellis, 2014). Aberdeenshire Education & Children's Services view "nurture" as a key approach in supporting the social and emotional needs of children and young people, thereby laying the foundations for equity and improved attainment outcomes.

Nurturing approaches are beneficial for all educational establishments and are recognised as an effective approach in supporting positive relationships and behaviour in Scottish schools (Scottish Government, 2016). Nurturing approaches are also crucial for supporting the needs of children who have experienced adversity and trauma. Research evidence has demonstrated that adversity in early childhood can lead to later negative outcomes for children and young people's health, stress levels and ability to self-regulate (Bellis et al, 2015). However, the evidence has also emphasised the importance of having a buffering adult who can mitigate against adverse experiences by providing consistent, nurturing care and support the attachment needs of a child (Daniel & Wassell, 2002).

There is a wealth of evidence highlighting the effectiveness of nurture groups (MacKay et al, 2010; Grantham & Primrose, 2017) as a supportive response to meeting the social and emotional needs of children and young people. However, as many children and young people across Scotland continue to face adversity and challenges, there is a recognised need to provide whole school approaches to wellbeing (Roffey, 2016). Nurturing approaches with a focus on attachment and relationship-based learning are a means of supporting pupils who have social, emotional and behavioural needs (Kearney & Nowek, 2019). Nationally and locally, there has been growing interest in widening nurture to the whole school, universal level so that *all* children can benefit from the principles and practices of nurture.

## What is Nurture?

At the heart of nurture is a focus on wellbeing and relationships and a drive to support the growth and development of children and young people, (Education Scotland, 2017)

A national definition has been developed by Education Scotland (p. 13, 2017)

*'A nurturing approach recognises that positive relationships are central to both learning and wellbeing. A key aspect of a nurturing approach is an understanding of attachment*

*theory and how early experiences can have a significant impact on development. It recognises that all school/ELC settings staff have a role to play in establishing the positive relationships that are required to promote healthy social and emotional development and that these relationships should be reliable, predictable and consistent where possible. A nurturing approach has a key focus on the school environment and emphasises the balance between care and challenge which incorporates attunement, warmth and connection alongside structure, high expectations and a focus on achievement and attainment’.*

## Adopting a whole school approach

Universal nurture describes whole school approaches that draw on attachment and resilience theory in order to benefit every child or young person in the establishment. Positive relationships across the school that are characterised by attunement and empathy are central to universal nurture. Positive relationships within and amongst the staff team are also key to a whole school approach as staff understand that they need to take care of and support each other, in order to effectively take care of and support the children in their school.

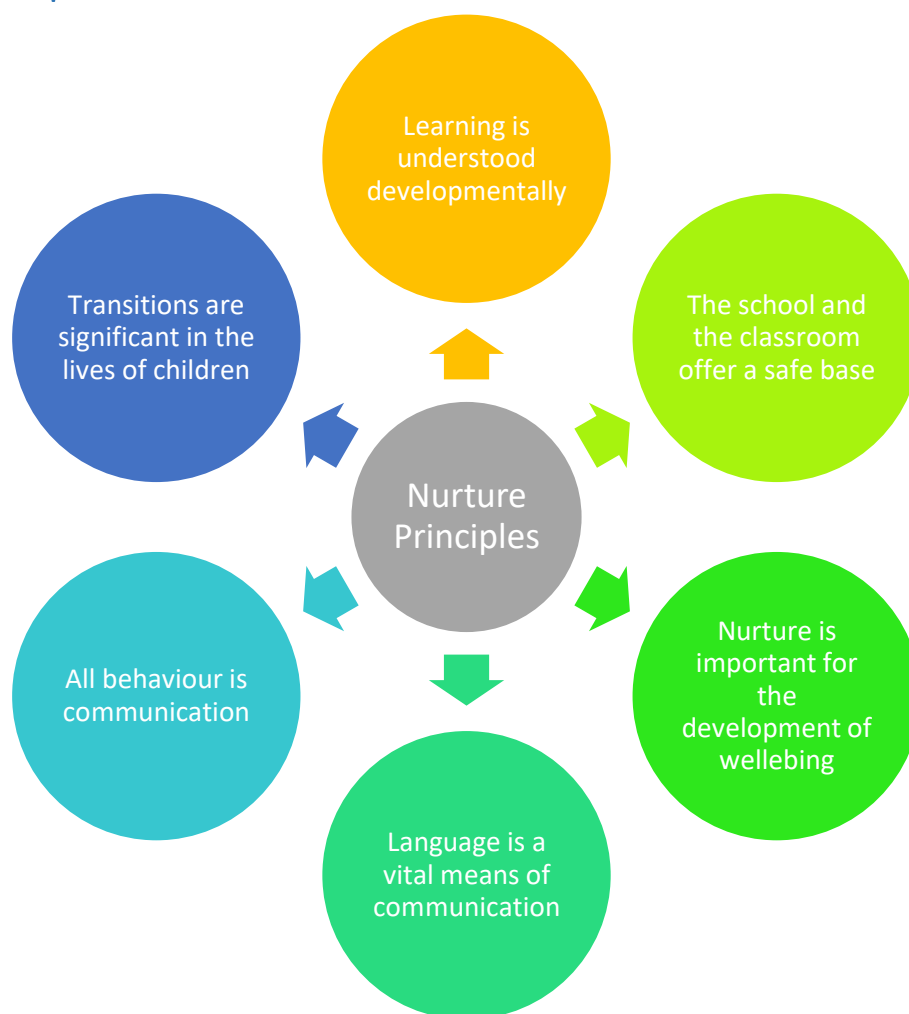
A whole school approach to wellbeing and nurture also allows for a far wider reach rather than just focusing on individual identified children. It will extend to those that fall under the radar and maybe are not identified as being at risk. A universal approach to nurture in schools provides a secure base for many children who do not have that secure base outside of school.

Education Scotland (2017) identified several key factors required for establishing a whole school approach to Nurture:

- A focus on play and a developmentally appropriate curriculum
- A focus on social and emotional learning across the school
- A focus on relationships is at the heart of the school approach
- An inclusive approach that supports all learners
- A clear vision for a consistent approach
- An emphasis on staff being able to understand and support the behaviour of children and young people
- A clear focus on attachment and child development.

Furthermore, for establishments to embed a universal approach to nurture, every member of staff needs to view interactions with children and young people through the lens of the six key nurture principles. The nurture principles should underpin the running of the school and are visible through all aspects of school life.

## Nurture Principles



### (1) Learning is understood developmentally

- The ethos of nurture views children and young people as individuals and enables plans for their learning to be tailored accordingly, not just based on academic outcomes but additionally taking account of social and emotional development needs.
- Staff have knowledge of how early experiences can impact on later development.
- There is an understanding of where a child's learning is in relation to their development and appropriate support and scaffolding are provided.
- The wellbeing indicators are used to identify children and young people who may require individualised support.

### (2) The school and classroom offer a safe base

- The school setting should provide a warm, welcoming environment for all staff, pupils, parents and partners.

- An organised environment allows for predictability and stability and helps children to feel safe and settled.
- Allocation of a key person to children and young people can support the development of positive relationships. A child or young person may need their key person to check in with regularly in order that they can share what has happened in their life overnight before they are ready to learn.
- Routines provide a sense of safety as they are predictable and allow pupils to feel more comfortable in their school environment. Changes to routines are discussed in advance (where possible) and are supported with verbal and visual reminders.
- Consistency in approaches and language used by staff to support pupil wellbeing.
- Greetings can be very important to children who can feel overwhelmed by school. Having a sense of belonging and being welcomed into the school every morning is likely to decrease children's feelings of anxiety.
- Identify safe spaces for staff and pupils where they can relax or have a bit of space when needed.

### (3) Nurture is important for the development of wellbeing

- Encourage the development of self-esteem, creating a focus on shared activities, valuing each child, giving positive feedback and praise for effort and persistence.
- Notice and encourage individual strengths and interests.
- There are high expectations placed on pupils, but this is balanced with warmth and a supportive nature throughout the school environment.
- Health and Wellbeing is a key focus within school priorities and is seen as a key factor in raising attainment.
- Staff support pupils to manage and understand overwhelming feelings through ongoing modelling and supportive discussions.
- Staff wellbeing is recognised as being crucial in supporting the wellbeing of children and families.
- Pupil voices are gathered in a variety of ways to inform individual and whole school planning.

### (4) Language is a vital means of communication

- There is recognition that some children and young people do not have the language to express their thoughts and feelings. Therefore, children and young people need to be taught about how to use expressive language as a socially appropriate means of communicating their needs and emotions.
- Supporting language development, especially around emotions can be done through staff naming and validating emotions. This allows pupils to link their behaviour to how they are feeling.
- Staff model the language associated with emotion through attuned interactions.

## (5) All behaviour is communication

- There is an understanding that children are still developing their language ability and may find it harder to articulate their feelings. Therefore, their feelings are likely to be displayed in their behavior.
- Consideration is given to what a child or young person may be trying to communicate through their behavior. Staff think about what the underlying need is and respond appropriately.
- Empathy and acceptance are demonstrated towards individuals' feelings and emotions.
- Staff understand and apply de-escalation techniques to support pupils' self-regulation skills.
- Regulatory and calming activities are built into the school day.

## (6) Transitions are significant in the lives of children.

- Children are prepared for both small day to day transitions and bigger transitions. Staff are explicit about routine throughout the day supporting children to feel safe and secure. Visual cues and supports can be helpful.
- Opportunities are provided to explore feelings towards significant transitions for pupils.
- Enhanced transitions for pupils requiring additional support to adjust to a new classroom or school, are provided.
- Consideration is given as to how to ensure positive beginnings and endings to the school day.

## School environment

Schools by their very nature often require children and young people to listen to adult instructions, follow classroom routines and instinctively trust that teachers are safe adults. For many children who have experienced adversity, this can be extremely difficult and goes against their previously developed survival strategies and defence mechanisms. Children and young people are also required to share adult support and attention with several others in the classroom. For some, there can be a fear of feeling forgotten about and they can feel unsafe without a trusted adult nearby at all times (Treisman, 2017).

The classroom environment itself, often provides significant challenges for pupils as it can be a busy, overwhelming confusing space. School buildings can overwhelm the senses and have a variety of unpredictable triggers which can leave a child feeling out of control and unsafe. Furthermore, school requires children to be able to negotiate multiple transitions throughout their day and to adapt to unpredictable situations. This can be incredibly difficult for children who have experienced traumatic endings or inconsistent, unpredictable care. For children to be able to learn and explore in school, they need to feel and believe that they are safe. Therefore, it is important for

consideration to be given to the physical environment which children access in school and how it can provide a nurturing safe base.

## A nurturing classroom

As part of a whole school nurturing approach, all mainstream classrooms implement the six nurture principles consistently. Nurturing classrooms provide a balance of support and challenge ensuring that children are reminded of boundaries whilst also being provided with strong emotional support and guidance (Treisman, 2017). Nurturing classrooms should provide predictability and structure to support children to feel safe. Having a visual timetable with a reminder of the plan for the day supports children to feel secure and familiar with the expectations of them for that day.

### Primary classroom

Primary classrooms may have areas for play and relaxation. These could include sand and water trays, puppetry and role-play areas, a board game corner, resources for drawing and comfy seated areas for reading, chatting or quiet alone time. Opportunities for role play allow children to learn appropriate behaviour or have it modelled in a fun and non-threatening way. The use of characters or small world toys can also help externalise the problem from being one of the child, to being one of the puppet.

### Secondary classroom

The secondary classroom serves a different purpose as most of the time children are only in each classroom for around an hour of learning. Nevertheless it is possible to create a sense of safety within this hour by greeting children at the door, checking in with the class as a whole, providing clear structures and expectations for the lessons and where possible allowing predictable routines to develop over the term. It helps children who need a higher level of nurture to know where they are sitting for example or to know what is coming up in the next lesson and to have plenty of advance warning for change or tests etc. These are all small things which can make a big difference to the nurture experienced by pupils within the secondary classroom.

## Nurture Nooks/Spaces

Although many children feel safe within a nurturing classroom, some children require a separate space which is easily accessible and provides a sense of calm and containment. Having a separate space can support emotional wellbeing and allows for conversations to take place in a quiet, private environment.

A nurture nook or space may have several purposes, for example:

- To support self-regulation
- To help children to feel safe
- To build trusting relationships with adults
- To be able to speak to an adult in confidence
- Somewhere to do some targeted work on a one to one or as part of a small group. For example, developing social and emotional skills through activities such as caring for a school pet or watering school plants etc.



- To provide a space for quality one to one time between an adult and child doing an activity that they enjoy.

Children are often drawn to small enclosed nooks as it enables a sense of emotional security. A nurture nook can be created within classrooms if there is space, by making a designated area far enough from group activities but still within eye and ear shot so children can still observe what is happening in the lesson. This space may contain some pillows, beanbags and blankets to make it comfortable, and a small selection of regulatory activities e.g. items for drawing or reading.



Children should be given the opportunity to use the space for various reasons depending on their individual needs. These nurturing spaces may give children who are finding it difficult to participate in classroom learning an opportunity to observe classroom life such as expectations of the classroom, from a safe contained space.

Some schools may have a sensory room or another separate space outside of the classroom which can provide a safe containing environment for children. Classrooms can be busy, noisy spaces and sometimes a child may benefit from time to talk to an adult in a space away from their peers.

An adult may think it is appropriate for a young person to use a separate space to develop individual skills or to support emotional regulation, or the child themselves may recognise the need to move to a separate space. If this space is outside the classroom, consideration will need to be given to staffing and access to this space for children.

Children may need a way of communicating they need their safe space e.g. a five-point scale or emotional check ins. Others may not have the ability to recognise they are overwhelmed and need support from an adult to feel safe. Adults can notice and reflect back to the child what they are observing. For example ' *You look like you might be feeling.....? I wonder if it would be good to try doing some colouring in the Nook?*'

## Transitions

The skill of managing transitions can be very difficult. Ideally in a universal approach to nurture, transitions should be minimised and planned for where possible. A transition to a space within a classroom may be easier than to one outside of the classroom. To support children with transitions throughout their day, visuals, comic strips and social stories are all beneficial to support understanding and preparation for change. Transitional objects, or sensory items may also support a child or young person to feel more comfortable with their transitions. In secondary schools, allowing pupils to transition five minutes earlier from the classroom may support their feelings of anxiety regarding ending of a lesson and the business of the corridors in between periods (See also Nurture Principle 6).

### Keeping pupils in mind

It can be useful for adults to further support transition by letting pupils know that they are being kept in mind. By this we mean that the child does not feel forgotten about if they are leaving the classroom and that the adult will be thinking of them. Phrases such as '*I look forward to hearing about.....when you come back*' or '*I can't wait to see the drawing who have been working on in the Nook*', help the pupil to have a sense of belonging and safety in their class..

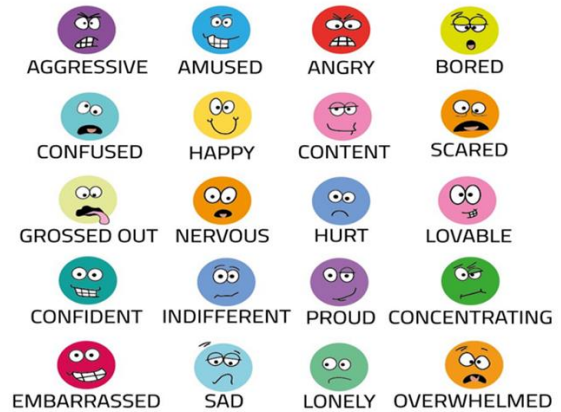
## Ideas for resources

If you are considering creating a nurture nook within a classroom or a nurture space in the school building, consideration should be given to the physical space available and the needs of pupils within your setting. The physical space and individual needs will help inform the types of resources and activities that will be required. Some ideas are listed below:

- Weighted blanket
- Swing/rocking chair
- Beanbags
- Water/Sand tray
- Sensory boxes – consisting of sensory items
- Regulatory activities- drawing/arts and crafts
- Worry Jar
- Deep breathing exercises
- Story books
- Opportunity to grow or take care of things e.g. plants, school pet.
- Items for role play/puppets
- Music

- Board games

### Visual tools



### How to develop a universal approach to Nurture

- The first step in becoming a nurturing establishment involves undertaking a Needs analysis/Whole School Readiness Checklist (Appendix 1) to gather information as to whether the setting is ready to take this forward as an approach and commit to a whole school nurturing project.

- It is important for establishments to judge the optimal time for introducing a new initiative as well as commitment from the senior leadership team to ensure effective implementation.
- The national framework which has been produced by Education Scotland (2017) entitled '*Applying Nurture as a whole school approach*', supplies a framework for whole education establishments to plan, implement and build on a nurturing approach.
- Aberdeenshire Educational Psychology Service (EPS) has developed nurture training which supports schools to develop their understanding of the nurture principles, the theoretical underpinnings of nurture and supports the planning of the implementation of the universal approach. The EPS can provide ongoing consultation and support to schools throughout their journey. Contact your Educational Psychologist for further information.
- If undertaking a commitment to develop a universal approach to nurture in a school setting, it will be crucial to ensure all staff receive nurture training, not just those interested. This will ensure a shared understanding and consistency in responses to pupils needs across the whole school community.

## Further information/resources

Supporting transitions:

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Supporting-Transitions-2.pdf>

[Social stories and comic strip conversations \(autism.org.uk\)](https://www.autism.org.uk/social-stories)

Self-regulation:

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Brainstem-Calmer-Activities.pdf>

[THE ZONES OF REGULATION: A CONCEPT TO FOSTER SELF-REGULATION & EMOTIONAL CONTROL - Welcome](#)

[SCALES - THE INCREDIBLE 5-POINT SCALE](#)

Fight/Flight/Freeze:

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/What-Are-You-Feeling.pdf>

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/What-Are-You-Feeling-Freeze-Collapse.pdf>

Meditation/Mindfulness/Relaxation in the classroom

<https://www.headspace.com/>

<https://mindfulnessinschools.org/>

[How to make a self-soothe box \(youngminds.org.uk\)](https://www.youngminds.org.uk/how-to-make-a-self-soothe-box)

Attachment strategies in the classroom

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Have-you-seen-me-1.pdf>

## References

Aberdeenshire Educational Psychology Service. (2017). *Nurture Hubs in Aberdeenshire. Evaluation Report*. <http://asn-aberdeenshire.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Nurture-Hubs-in-Aberdeenshire-Evaluation-2017.pdf>

ASPEP (2019). Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists Position Paper on Nurture. Retrieved from

Bellis, M.A., Ashton, K., Hughes, K., Ford, K., Bishop, J., & Paranjothy, S. (2015) Adverse childhood experiences and their impact on health-harming behaviours in the Welsh adult population. *Public Health Wales*, 26, 1-36

Bennathan M. & Boxall M. (2000). *Effective Intervention in Primary Schools: Nurture Groups*. Routledge. London

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014). *Getting It Right for Every Child. Edinburgh.*

Daniel, B., & Wassell, S. (2002). *Adolescence: Assessing and promoting resilience in vulnerable children 3*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Education Scotland. (2017). Applying nurture as a whole school approach. Retrieved from <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation/applying-nurture-as-a-whole-school-approach-a-framework-to-support-self-evaluation/>

Grantham, R., & Primrose, F. (2017). Investigating the fidelity and effectiveness of Nurture Groups in the secondary school context. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 22(3), 219-236.

Kearney M & Nowek G. (2019), Beyond Nurture Groups to Nurturing Approaches: A focus on the development of nurture in the Scottish context. *The International*

Journal of Nurture in Education. Retrieved from  
[https://www.nurtureuk.org/sites/default/files/ijne\\_vol\\_5\\_final.pdf](https://www.nurtureuk.org/sites/default/files/ijne_vol_5_final.pdf)

MacKay, T., Reynolds, S. & Kearney, M. (2010). From attachment to attainment: The impact of nurture groups on academic achievement. *Educational & Child Psychology*, 27(3), 100–110.

Roffey, S. (2016). Building a case for whole-child, whole-school wellbeing in challenging contexts. *Educational & Child Psychology* 33.2:30-42.

Scottish Government (2016). Behaviour in Scotland's Schools. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government.

Sosu, E., & Ellis, S. (2014). Closing the Attainment Gap in Scottish Education. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. University of Starthclyde.

Treisman, K. (2017). Working with relational and developmental trauma in children and adolescents. Taylor and Francis Ltd. London.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Whole School Readiness Checklist

Retrieved from:

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/inc55Appendix1a.pdf>

Please note this questionnaire should be completed by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) or Implementation Team within the school (this might include partners).

1. Our Senior Leadership Team (SLT) are willing to fully support and model the implementation of nurturing approaches.  
YES/ NO
2. Our SLT have had some awareness raising/training on nurturing approaches.  
YES/ NO
3. Nurturing approaches will be part of our school and early learning and childcare (ELC) setting improvement plan.  
YES/ NO
4. Our SLT have presented information to all staff about the approach.  
YES/ NO

If yes, what date did this take place:

If not yet, when will this take place:

5. We have discussed the needs of our school and feel that a nurturing approach is a good fit.  
YES/NO
6. Opportunities for sharing/observing practice in nurturing approaches have been provided.  
YES/NO

If not, how will that/will those be provided?

7. We are confident as a school that we have the time, skills and resources to implement nurturing approaches effectively.  
YES/NO

8. We are able to allocate time or already have allocated time for all staff to implement full training on the Nurturing Initiatives within the school/ ELC setting before we start the programme.

YES/NO

9. We have considered ways to inform parents/carers and involve them in nurturing approaches, and we will seek innovative ways of doing

YES/NO

10. Opportunities for sharing/observing practice in nurturing approaches have been provided.

YES/NO

If No, please note how they will be built in to the on-going implementation.

12. We have an area within the school to display/pass on nurturing approaches information to parents/carers, for example, a notice board, leaflet or regular newsletter.

YES/NO

13. We recognise that nurturing approaches should be implemented as intended, and that if changes are made this could influence the effects and limit the benefits.

YES/NO

14. We have considered ways of providing coaching as an important part of embedding nurturing approaches, and have made plans to help staff engage in this.

YES/NO

15. We are aware that evaluation of impact is crucial and have made plans for what evaluation will be carried out to measure this.

YES/NO

16. We have identified support agencies who will help us to embed nurturing approaches.

YES/NO

17. We could accommodate an Education Scotland visit to support the implementation of nurturing approaches.

YES/NO

18. We have considered ways of involving children and young people in the taking forward of nurturing approaches.



YES/NO

19. We have explored how a nurturing approach fits with other key policies and approaches in the school.

YES/NO

20. We need more information before we can take forward a nurturing approach.

YES/NO

I require...(Please outline your requirements to implement nurturing approaches.)